

**MINUTES OF THE ELLENSBURG LOCAL MEETING OF THE
WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION AND THE JOINT
TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
July 26, 2006**

The local jurisdiction meeting of the Washington State Transportation Commission was called to order at 8:30 a.m., on Wednesday, July 26, 2006, at the Ellensburg Inn & Conference Center, 1700 Canyon Road, Ellensburg, Washington.

Commissioners present at the meeting were: Chair Dick Ford, Ed Barnes, Bob Distler, Elmira Forner, Carol Moser and Dale Stedman. Dan O'Neal absent.

INTRODUCTIONS, WELCOME, AND GENERAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Representative Flannigan welcomed the Commission, Representative Beverly Woods thanked the Commission for inviting her to attend, and Senator Joyce Mullikan expressed her appreciation to the Commission for visiting her district.

Senator Mary Margaret Haugen thanked Representative Flannigan, Representative Woods and Senator Mullikan for attending the meeting.

**JOINT TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE/TRANSPORTATION BENCHMARKS
AND GOALS**

Mike Groesch, Staff Coordinator, Senate Transportation Committee, noted that one of the Blue Ribbon Commission's recommendations was a review of Transportation's Goals and Benchmarks. The Commission as well as the Transportation Performance Audit Board (TPAB) have since reviewed these goals and benchmarks. The TPAB retained Lund Consulting, Inc. and Cedar River Group to study Transportation Goals, Benchmarks and Ten-year Investment Criteria and Process. It was recommended that existing statutes be replaced with new legislation that identifies overarching goals for the state transportation system, and that the Department of Transportation report annually to the Governor and the Legislature on the progress of meeting the mandated goals and corresponding objectives and performance measures. Senator Haugen, Chair, Joint Transportation Committee (JTC), opened the question that the JTC assumes the responsibility of carrying forward the study recommendations.

It was moved by Representative Beverly Woods and seconded by Representative Flannigan that the JTC move forward with the adoption and implementation of the Benchmark and Goals recommendations contractually. The motion passed unanimously.

OVERVIEW OF LOCAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Mayor Obie O'Brien, City of Ellensburg, addressed local transportation issues specifically the I-90 redesign and new interchanges for I-90 in the Ellensburg area. He pointed out that a proposed toll on I-90/Snoqualmie Pass would limit casual traffic affecting tourism and commercial traffic, and the delivery of goods and materials outside of Eastern Washington. He provided an overview of the city's request for consideration of interchanges that will fit into the city's long-range plan. He also shared his concerns regarding reliable funding.

OVERVIEW REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION ISSUES

Paul Bennett, QUAD-County RTPO (QUADCO), provided an overview of QUADCO's (representing Lincoln, Grant, Adams and Kittitas Counties) structure and purpose. He explained that QUADCO's membership is diverse and unique and ranges from local county governments and cities with populations in the thousands to small towns with populations of only a few hundred.

Since its formation the QUAD-County RTPO has focused on providing a planning process targeted toward the cooperation and dedication to all of its members regardless of community location or size. He also commented regarding regional plans and funding for local projects.

Page Scott, Executive Director, Yakima Valley Conference of Governments explained that the COG is the lead agency for both the metropolitan and regional transportation planning organizations. She provided an overview of the COG's participation in the Washington Transportation Plan, TRANS-Action as well as other activities.

Al Hubert, Chair, Yakima Valley MPO/RTPO emphasized that it's important for the Yakima Valley to have adequate transportation facilities in order to get produce to market. He explained the challenges that the valley has because of several small cities spread throughout. In order to track projects a plan is in place that emphasizes the priorities.

WTP OVERVIEW

Brian Smith, Director, Strategic Planning & Programming, WSDOT shared that the WTP draft plan has been released for public review and comment. He distributed a discussion guide for the plan that provided a snapshot of the key points that are contained in the plan. The purpose of public outreach is to listen to community feedback and allow for new opportunities for working together. The challenge is to achieve a plan vision in spite of the continued and increasing demand for different modes of transportation alongside funding constraints and instability, as well as reduced buying power of available funds.

Senator Mulliken commented that the public has a perception that a large percentage of gas tax dollars are going to environmental requirements to meet federal and state mandates. WSDOT needs to educate the public on what's tangible to support the plans.

Commissioner Stedman urged that the WTP must be viewed as a 20-year outreach plan.

Representative Jarrett commented that he fears that today's cost pressures may force projects into being done incorrectly, which in turn creates the inability to meet future demands. He questioned if the WTP looks at the replacement value of the transportation system. Commissioner Stedman responded that it was not looked at, but felt that the question does need to be answered. Mr. Smith noted that there is a report that indicates the investment value of the system, but not the replacement cost.

OVERVIEW OF STATE PROJECTS IN REGION AND I-90 / SNOQUALMIE PASS PROJECT

Don Whitehouse, Administrator, South Central Region, WSDOT provided an overview of Central Washington projects underway that are on time and on schedule even though there have been challenges. He explained that Interstate 90 is a major transportation corridor, linking Puget Sound to eastern Washington and beyond. The I-90 traveler may experience congestion, delays due to avalanche closures, rough pavement conditions, rock slide activity and potential wildlife collisions on the highway.

WSDOT is working with the US Forest Service, the US Department of Fish and Wildlife, and other agencies to develop the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) of the 15-mile corridor from Hyak to Easton

Brian White, I-90 Project Director, South Central Region, WSDOT explained that this project will improve I-90 to provide a safer, more efficient six-lane freeway from Hyak to Easton.

Minimal avalanche closures and reduced rockfall hazards will result from the use of tunnels and/or mitigation measures. New pavement will provide a smoother ride. The public should also enjoy a safer drive due to stabilized slopes and a realigned roadway. Wildlife will also cross I-90 safely, with the installation of new bridges and culverts. Overall, I-90 will be a safer and more reliable route to travel on between Western and Eastern Washington.

TOLLING STUDY MODELING RESULTS FOR SNOQUALMIE PASS

Jeff Buxbaum, Project Manager, Cambridge Systematics, Inc., briefed the Commission regarding the possibility of tolling Snoqualmie Pass. The analysis was not as detailed as what might be done in an urban area, but took into consideration a shift to other alternative routes. Due to distance and time of alternate routes the pass clearly had the advantage. If a toll were imposed it is believed that about 90 percent of the traffic would remain on the pass as opposed to going an alternate route. Traffic counts, peak travel times, toll rate structure and public outreach were discussed.

TOLLING STUDY STATEWIDE PUBLIC OUTREACH RESULTS

Jeff Buxbaum, Project Manager, Cambridge Systematics Inc. and Frank Wilson, Frank Wilson and Associates Inc., provided a briefing regarding the results of the public and stakeholder outreach. Mr. Wilson explained that the purpose of the outreach was to give information and receive feedback from the public and stakeholders to ensure that public input was obtained and considered before final recommendation decisions are made. Key feedback indicated that the public is concerned about more taxes and feel that the current tax collection should be sufficient for transportation. The public seems willing to accept tolling under specific conditions and for specific projects, but expressed concern that tolling will result in too much diversion of traffic onto free roads or local streets. It is apparent that public education is needed, especially when it comes to the benefits of tolling use for system efficiency and management.

Senator Haugen shared that the Legislature is looking at many alternative means of transportation financing and congestion management tools, with tolling being one of the options under consideration to close the large gap between demonstrated needs and available funding. Gene Baxstrom, Joint Transportation Committee explained how data modeling use for forecasting transportation financing will be used as an aide in putting together future funding packages.

ENVIRONMENTAL MITIGATION COST ACCOUNTING

Megan White, Director, Environmental Services Office and Ken Smith, Deputy State Design Engineer, Design Office, WSDOT, briefed the Commission regarding the purpose of environmental mitigation and costs. The Department seeks to minimize changes to the environment to the greatest extent possible.

Mitigation varies widely from project to project and generally involves federal, tribal, state and local governments to develop conditions to prevent negative impacts to the environment. Mr. Smith provided an overview of mitigation costs for projects that were evaluated in 2003 and 2006 noting that storm water mitigation represents the largest portion of mitigation costs consistently in this time frame. At the same time resource agencies are increasing their expectations of the Department in terms of the level of storm water management required on transportation projects. The Federal Highway Administration will soon release its report "Cost of Complying with Federal-Aid Highway Requirements, Task 5 Environmental Costs in Federal-Aid Projects."

Ms. White emphasized that the Department is focused on working collaboratively with resource agencies to secure timely permits in order to get projects done on time and within cost. There are several challenges, those being noise mitigation, wetland protection and endangered species protection. There is a lot of scrutiny to projects especially in urban areas on the eastside of the state. Additional information regarding 2003 and 2006 Project Mitigation Case Studies can be found at <http://www.wsdot.wa.gov/projects/mitigation/>.

Senator Haugen emphasized that it's important that WSDOT include cultural resources in mitigation costs. There has recently been a classic example of how WSDOT has not built in those costs. In the future those costs must be included as a part of the mitigation costs.

PUBLIC AND LEGISLATOR COMMENT PERIOD

No public or Legislator comment.

The Commission meeting adjourned at 4:25 p.m., on July 26, 2006.

WASHINGTON STATE TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

DICK FORD, Chair

ELMIRA FORNER, Vice-Chair

EDWARD BARNES, Member

CAROL MOSER, Member

DAN O'NEAL, Member

ROBERT S. DISTLER, Member

DALE STEDMAN, Member

DOUGLAS MACDONALD, Ex-Officio Member
Secretary of Transportation

ATTEST:

REEMA GRIFFITH, Executive Director

DATE OF APPROVAL